



**November 25, 2003**

## **Pair charged with telemarketing fraud**

A federal complaint has charged Marilyn Cruz, of Providence, and Shanta Garner, of Coral Gables, Florida, and formerly of Providence, with telemarketing fraud, alleging that the two women bilked elderly victims out of thousands of dollars by fraudulently inducing them to pay fees for non-existent sweepstakes prizes.

The Office of the United States Attorney, Kenneth W. Kaiser, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Colonel Steven M. Pare, Superintendent of the Rhode Island State Police, jointly announced a complaint that was filed in U.S. District Court on September 5. A warrant for the arrest of Cruz and Garner remained active while agents searched for Garner, who had left Rhode Island. Federal agents arrested Garner yesterday at her home in Coral Gables. Also yesterday, federal agents and Rhode Island State Police arrested Cruz at her home at 916 Branch Avenue, Providence.

According to an affidavit filed in support of the complaint, a two-year investigation by the **FBI** and the **Rhode Island State Police** developed evidence that Cruz and Garner, along with others, engaged in a long-running telemarketing fraud scheme aimed at defrauding senior citizens throughout the country. According to the affidavit, the two women, often using aliases, telephoned their intended victims and told them they'd won prizes of between \$100,000 and \$19.3 million. The victims were told that, in order to claim their prizes, they had to wire money

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to cover fees and taxes. Many of the calls were made from 180 Harold Street, Providence, where Cruz and Garner formerly lived.

The defendants allegedly induced at least 26 victims to send a total of more than \$400,000 to various addresses in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Florida and the Bahamas. According to the affidavit, one victim sent approximately \$56,000 in 69 payments; another sent \$84,500 in 51 payments.

Cruz, 38, appeared yesterday before Magistrate Judge David L. Martin and is detained pending resolution of a detention hearing. Garner, 24, was to appear before a U.S. Magistrate Judge in Miami, Florida. The government is asking that she be detained and returned to Rhode Island for prosecution. The charges – conspiracy to commit wire fraud and wire fraud – are felonies and are subject to grand jury review.

The **Rhode Island State Police** and the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** are investigating the case, with assistance from police in various communities across the country where the victims live. Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee H. Vilker is prosecuting the case.

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